

# **Recommended Practices for Assessing Communication and Learning Skills in Young Children Who are Deafblind**

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## Recommended Practices for Assessing Communication and Learning Skills in Young Children who are Deafblind (funded by U.S. Department of Education)

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## Challenges of Assessing Young Children Who Are Deafblind

- May not use conventional forms of communication
- May use very subtle means of expression
- Professionals often inexperienced
- Assessment instruments may not be appropriate

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## Areas of Focus

- Deafblind (definition in U.S.A)
- 2-8 year old children who are nonspeaking and have significant intellectual limitations
- Communication and cognitive development

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## Activities/Studies

- Nationwide survey of parents
- Nationwide survey of professionals
- Expert query
- Family specialist query
- Poll of state projects
- Focus groups
- Collection of assessment and IEP data on 0-5 year olds

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## Parent Survey (74) Most satisfactory aspects of my child's latest evaluation

- 40% - Child is making progress
- 13% - Child treated respectfully, supportive, caring
- 13% - Gave parents information on child's development
- 13% - Evaluator cared about parent input
- 10% - Everyone worked together as team for child
- 8% - Parents given information on what to do for child, goals for child
- 5% - Tried to adapt test to fit child

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## Parent Survey (74) Least satisfactory aspects of my child's latest evaluation

- 40% - Tests inappropriate, underestimated child
- 20% - Evaluation didn't provide helpful facts or suggest things to try
- 15% - Lack of progress of child
- 13% - Tests focused on what child can't do, rather than progress
- 10% - Evaluator didn't know child
- 5% - Didn't like how child was handled

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## Parent Survey (74)

### Most frequent suggestions for assessment process

- 40% - Evaluators should get to know child
- 35% - Get input from parents and classroom
- 28% - Evaluations should help parents understand how to set goals and move forward
- 20% - Use tests appropriate for child who is deafblind
- 15% - Tell parents names of assessments, what for, what doing during assessment
- 10% - Start with child's strengths and reasonable goals
- 5% - Child's needs should be paramount—not costs or difficulty of trying new things

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## Criteria for "Short List"

- High ratings by 135 professionals who completed survey
- Designed for assessment of 2-8 year olds
- Include sections on cognitive and/or social-communication skills
- Readily available
- Other instruments developed specifically for population also included

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## "Short List" of Assessments

- Callier-Azusa (Stillman) \*
- Carolina Developmental Profile (Johnson-Martin, Attermeir & Hacker)
- HELP-Hawaii Early Learning Profile (Parks & Furuno)
- Infused Skills Assessment (Hagood) \*
- INSITE (Morgan & Watkins) \*
- Oregon Project (Anderson, Boigon, Davis & deWaard)
- Vineland (Sparrow, Balla & Cicchetti)
- Communication Matrix (Rowland)
- Dimensions of Communication (Mar & Sall) \*
- Home Talk (various authors) \*
- School Inventory of Problem Solving Skills (Rowland & Schweigert)\*

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## Qualitative Data Sources

In-depth Interviews (14)  
Focus Group Interview (10)  
Survey of Family Specialists (12)

## Qualitative Findings Interviews and Surveys

### Challenges:

- Appropriate assessment tools
- Expertise of assessment team
- Time to conduct assessment
- Accuracy of assessment report
- Relationship to program planning

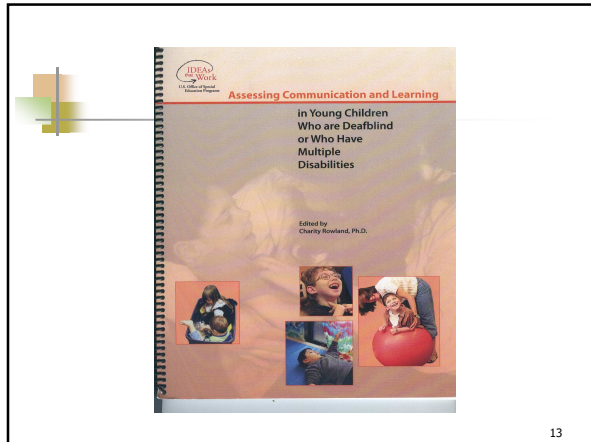
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## Qualitative Findings Interviews and Surveys

### Recommendations:

- ✓ Family involvement
  - ✓ Multiple and skilled observations
  - ✓ Natural situations
  - ✓ Familiarity with child
  - ✓ Interview skills
  - ✓ Interdisciplinary approach
- In other words, use an "authentic" approach

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## Authentic Assessment

- A multidimensional, team-based approach which seeks to:
- Capture the richness and complexity of a child's cognition and behavior
  - Understand the child in the context of his/her natural social and physical environment
  - Integrate the family's perspective with those of professionals
  - Apply the information to enhance the child's development and acquisition of skills.

## The Planning Phase

- Assembling the Team
- Getting the Family Involved
- Selecting Appropriate Assessment Instruments
- Scheduling Observations in Natural and Staged Contexts
- Involving Specialists

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## Assembling the Team

- Define the questions and the scope of the assessment
- Multidisciplinary
- Include individuals with deepest knowledge of child

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## Getting the Family Involved

What the assessment team can do:

- Meet with the family in advance
- Address their questions and concerns
- Identify any obstacles to participation

What the family can do:

- Prepare questions and identify your goals and concerns in advance.
- List your child's special skills and interests.
- Ask about the instruments and procedures, and who participates in the assessment.
- Suggest possible times that a team member might observe your child at home or in other familiar settings.
- Complete any parent questionnaires or assessments so that the team can better understand your child's abilities.

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## Selecting Appropriate Assessment Instruments

- Helps structure observations:
  - What to look for
  - How to interpret
  - Compare across observers
- Accuracy, Applicability, Convenience
- May use parts of several instruments
- See reviews in our assessment guide
- What about standardized tests?

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## Observing in Natural Contexts and Staged Situations

### Natural

- Gather information about the child in everyday contexts and routines
- Identify typical and optimal skills
- Multiple perspectives

### Staged

- Manipulate the natural context to encourage specific behaviors
- Fill in gaps in knowledge and validate impressions

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## Involving Specialists

- Vision specialists
- Hearing specialists
- Physical therapist
- Occupational therapist
- Speech-language pathologist
- Health professionals

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What Questions Should an Authentic Assessment Address?

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## Expressive Communication

What existing communication behaviors should be promoted and what new skills should be targeted?

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## Receptive Communication

What forms of communication does the child understand? How can we best communicate with this child?

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## Social Interaction

What opportunities exist to enhance the child's social interactions, play, and communication with others?

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## Hearing/Vision

What adaptations and accommodations are needed to support the child's use of hearing/vision for communication?

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## Sensori-motor Skills

What adaptations are needed to support the motor behaviors and tactual experiences needed for communication?

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## Preferences

What activities, materials, people, and contexts motivate the child to communicate and learn?

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## Temperament

How does the child's temperament affect learning and communication?  
How can we use this information to develop effective interventions?

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## Final Products

- Guidelines for the Assessment of Young Children who are Deafblind
- Data Summary
- PowerPoint DBI conference 2009

[http://www.ohsu.edu/oidd/d2l/com\\_pro/db\\_assess\\_ab.cfm](http://www.ohsu.edu/oidd/d2l/com_pro/db_assess_ab.cfm)

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